

Chapter 1: The Early Israelites

...book pages 9-16

Adapting to a Changing World

Chapter Overview

Israel became a unified kingdom under King David, but later it split in two and eventually was destroyed. Many Israelites were forced out of their homeland, yet some returned to rebuild it, even as others remained in the Diaspora to flourish in foreign lands. Many Jews who lived in Israel and in the Diaspora were able to adapt Judaism to their changing circumstances.

Core Concepts

- As their circumstances changed, the Israelites changed their way of life in order to adapt to the loss of their Temple, their land, and their leaders.
- Despite the many adaptations they made, both in the land of Israel and in exile, the Israelites maintained their core religious beliefs and identities.
- The Israelites' ability to adapt can serve today's Jews as a model for balancing the need for change with a commitment to Jewish tradition.

Words to Know

Diaspora: p.14. Places outside the Land of Israel where Jews live.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the Israelites' values and beliefs help them to maintain their Jewish identity when they had their own kingdom, as well as when they were under foreign rule? How do your values and beliefs help you to define your religious identity today?
2. What are some of the ways the Israelites adapted to their society without abandoning their core religious values? What are some of the ways that North American Jews today adapt to the society in which they live while at the same time maintaining their Jewish identity?
3. What motivated Persian Jews during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Israel? What factors motivate some modern Jews to make *aliyah* (immigrate to Israel)? Is making *aliyah* a Jewish imperative today?